

IRAQI FISH FARMS TAKING SOME JORDANIAN LESSONS

Fish Farmers Making Adjustments to Ponds, Pumps and Pellets

(Hillah, Iraq) -- If you were an Iraqi, your "Friday Night Fish" choice would undoubtedly be carp...grass carp. But before you snarl your upper lip and crinkle your nose, consider this: pound-for-pound, fish is much less expensive in Iraq than poultry, beef or lamb.

Unfortunately, fish is not as prevalent in the Iraqi diet as it was before the first Gulf War in 1991. The fish decline can be attributed, in part, to the devastation in the Arab Marshlands caused by Saddam Hussein.

Even though Iraq has fish farms, they pale in comparison to those in the neighboring country of Jordan.



"What Jordan produces in one, single fish pond would take eight or more ponds in Iraq to equal," said U.S. Navy Captain Hank Domeracki. "In fact, Jordan could easily produce twice as much as they do now but they are satisfied to raise only that which their country consumes."



The U.S. military and coalition forces are working with the government of Iraq to implement three key changes to the way Iraqis raise their grass and silver carp.

First, the current fish ponds are too large. The fish are able to swim freely and unrestricted which is not conducive to gaining weight. Smaller fish ponds would be much more efficient and effective.



Second, the current ponds do not have fresh water pumps or running aerators. Natural wind blowing over open water is the only source of oxygen for the fish. The lack of fresh water leads to less than ideal conditions inside the ponds.

And third, the grain-based meal currently used as fish food looks more like sawdust and contains only a 10% blend of protein. Jordan, for example, uses little fish pellets that contain a 30% protein blend. More protein means more weight and larger fish in a shorter amount of time.

It takes the Jordanians 41 days to grow a fish for consumption. It takes the Iraqis 9-months to grow the same fish before its market ready.

Story by Paul McKellips, US Department of State, Public Affairs GO Team, on assignment in Iraq.

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